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ABSTRACT

To determine the special English language needs of foreign students enrolled in a Colorado community college, a needs assessment questionnaire was designed and administered to professors and lecturers and, in a variety of subject areas, to students enrolled in English as a second language classes at the school. Analysis of the responses given by the 49 teachers and 46 students indicates that curricula in the ESL classes should focus on the reading and vocabulary necessary for the beginning college students and on the brief writing tasks required in community college courses. Skills necessary to absorb material from a lecture were also stressed, such as notetaking, listening for main ideas, and asking questions. The results indicated that the ESL program in existence at the college had attempted to include instruction in too many skills and that it did not differentiate between students needing beginning language instruction and those wanting to concentrate on the skills necessary for success in higher-level college classes. (A copy of the survey form is appended.) (FL)

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ENGLISH NEEDS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS: A FACULTY SURVEY

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ENGLISH NEEDS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS: A FACULTY SURVEY

The community college and the international student have discovered each other! The latest edition of Open Doors (New York Institute of International Education 1981) reports that almost 50,000 foreign students chose to enroll in two-year institutions during 1979-80, 17.4 per cent of the total reported foreign student enrollment in the United States.

Not only is the total community college enrollment substantial, but it also represents a 16 per cent increase over the previous year. In fact, the percentage of the total foreign student group reported each year as attending community colleges has risen steadily during the latter part of the past decade (Lambert 1981).

Why this increase? One of the major reasons seems to be the realization on the students' part of the transition that the community college provides between an intensive English language school and a university or 4-year college. Sponsoring organizations and private students see several advantages to the bridge that the community college offers: small classes, low-cost, high-priority 1-year technical training programs, strong programs of student support services, and slightly lower admission standards coupled with developmental or ESL programs. Some two-year colleges are also beginning to realize the advantages of international student enrollment: increased FTE and added opportunities to expand a relatively small academic community into an international/intercultural institution. On the other hand, many community college instructors believe that foreign students are a nuisance. Some of the common complaints include: "They are always in my office asking for extra help," "They don't belong in my classes because their English isn't adequate," and "What are they doing here, when they could be studying in their own countries and in their own languages?"

To heighten the advantages of international student enrollment, both for the student and for the college, it is necessary for the institution to answer the complaints and work on the problems which are central to these complaints. Who in the college should do this? The ESL division is the most logical choice because the teachers in this area of the college best know the needs of the international student and can serve as a link to the rest of the academic community. The Spring International School, the intensive English program which I represent, is a non-profit educational corporation located at Arapahoe Community College in Littleton. In addition to instructing foreign students in English on a full-time 5-hour-a-day basis, we were fortunate enough to be asked by the college to teach "polish-up" English classes to entering foreign students pursuing courses in their individual majors in the college. This series of four ESL classes bears non-transferable academic credit of 3 hours a quarter. In assuming the role as liaison between foreign students and the academic community, we are progressing through a five-step plan designed to meet the needs of both the college and the international student body:

1. Assessment of foreign student needs.

2. Structure of an ESL curriculum which will meet these needs.

3. Administration of a standardized test to all entering international students, followed by placement of students in a series of EFL classes, or by placement out of the series into the credit classes required of all college freshmen.

4. Data gathering to determine the success of students who complete full-credit English classes after finishing EFL classes.

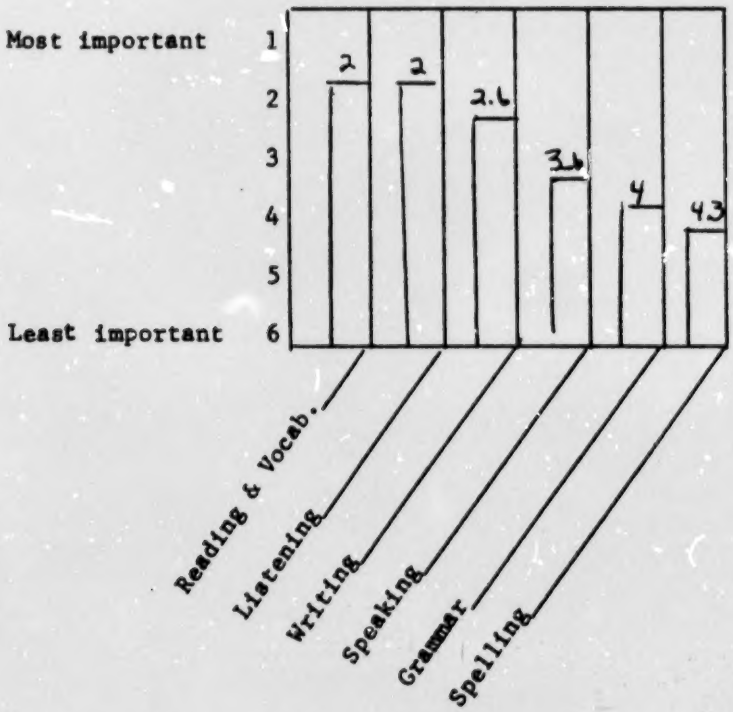
5. Dissemination of information to the community college staff regarding student purposes in the United States, systems of education in students' native countries, and cultural information about major countries represented in the international student body.

The key to this process is the Needs Assessment, which provides the community college staff and the foreign students with the opportunity to make input into the design of the EFL classes.

Viewing a Needs Assessment as central to development of an ESL curriculum is not a new perception. Seventy ESL teachers and program administrators who participated in a 1978 bi-regional conference of NAFSA listed three major priority areas for ESL programs or courses in academic institutions: 1) Improve the status of ESL faculty and programs, 2) Develop ESL curricula which better meet the needs of students and institutions, and 3) Design better proficiency and placement instruments. Within the second priority, four items ranked together as needing the most attention: 1) Determine the language needs of students for academic success, 2) Add an EST/ESP emphasis to programs, 3) Conduct research in English for academic purposes as a basis for materials development, and 4) Base program planning on a needs analysis of institutions and students. (Jacobs and Constantinides 1980). Individual institutions also are assessing English skills requirements, recent examples of which include Ann Johns' Academic Skills Questionnaire at San Diego State University (Johns 1981) and the American Language Institute Student Survey of Academic Needs. (Ostler 1980).

In November 1980 a Foreign Student Needs Assessment Questionnaire was designed by Kay Gallowich, one of the teachers in the Spring School program, with input from other teachers who shared responsibility for the Arapahoe Community College ESL classes. The questionnaire was then administered to 109 professors and lecturers and, in turn, to 46 students enrolled in EFL classes at the college, which has a foreign student enrollment of 150 in a total college population of 6000. Of 109 questionnaires sent to professors and lecturers, 49 were returned and tabulated. The respondents represented all disciplines of the college.

Part A of the questionnaire (see attachment) asked for a listing of major emphases in the study of English in order of importance for foreign students' success in college classes (1 = most important through 6 = least important). Prioritizing of emphases produced the following averages of all respondents' rankings:



As might be expected, responses differed according to the discipline of the lecturer. Respondents from the English area ranked writing first, grammar second. When responses of technical instructors were averaged, three skills tied for the ranking of most important: writing, listening, and reading/vocabulary. Although only four lecturers in science and math responded to the questionnaire, these four ranked listening first and reading second.

Part B of the questionnaire dealt with specific English language abilities and their importance for success in classes taught by the respondents. Ability to write a research paper was ranked of lesser importance by 75 per cent of the professors and lecturers (a rating of 3, 4, or 5). Ability to write an organized essay answer on an essay test was gauged most important by 40 percent of the respondents and very important to another 20 per cent. Ability to write a composition was split evenly among the five rankings, with no marked grouping in any one category.

Seventy-eight per cent of the respondents agreed that ability to read textbooks in major school subjects was most important of all. Ability to recognize the main idea and supporting ideas of college textbooks and general reading was ranked most important or very important by 93 per cent. Ability to recognize the meaning of a large number of words was marked most important or very important by 70 per cent of the lecturers and professors.

Listening skills also received high rankings by the respondents. Ability to listen while taking notes on a professor's lecture was rated most important of all by 53 per cent of the respondents and very important by an additional 33 per cent. Forty-eight per cent felt that ability to listen well in order to answer professor's questions and ask questions was of most importance with 24 per cent ranking this skill as very important.

Spelling ability received lower rankings, with only 25 per cent of the respondents rating this skill as important. Ability to outline a lecture or reading material was marked of average importance (a rating of 3) by 42 per cent with other rankings spread evenly over the scale. Ability to write grammatically correct sentences was rated of most importance by 26 per cent, very important by 17 per cent, and important by 31 per cent. Ability to converse well in a group discussion in a formal classroom was ranked of average to least importance by 62 per cent of the respondents. Ability to give speeches and/or reports in front of a college class also ranked low on the scale, with 42 per cent saying it was of least importance.

A similar questionnaire was given to 46 students enrolled in the EFL 172, 173 and 174 classes. These foreign students ranked writing first in order of importance, in contrast to the professor/lecturer results, followed by grammar, listening and reading/vocabulary as close seconds. Both teachers and students rated speaking and spelling lower on the list.

Writing	2
Listening	3
Grammar	3
Reading/Vocabulary	3
Speaking	3.5
Spelling	4

In Section B of the questionnaire, 60 per cent of the students rated ability to write a research paper as most or very important for success in college classes, in direct contrast to ratings by teachers. The same percentage of students ranked ability to write essay answers on a test as most or very important. Seventy-five per cent of the students believed the ability to write a composition was most or very important.

Students, as well as professors, ranked reading skills high on the list of necessary abilities for success in college classes. Seventy-two per cent ranked the ability to read textbooks in their major school subjects as most or very important. Related to text reading was recognition of main ideas and recognition of word meanings, both of which 60 per cent felt most or very important.

Ability to listen well in order to answer a professor's questions and to ask questions in return was ranked most important by 44 per cent of the foreign students, with another 19 per cent rating it very important.

Although students felt this listening skill to be important, not as many of them ranked it as high as the teachers. On the other hand, students found spelling to be a more important skill than their teachers did; 78 per cent ranked it most important through average importance. Ability to outline a lecture or reading material also was ranked higher by students than by professor/lecturers. Seventy-six per cent ranked it of most importance to average importance for success in college. Seventy-one per cent of the students rated ability to write grammatically correct sentences as most or very important in contrast to 33 per cent of the teachers who ranked this same skill as most or very important.

Fifty-nine per cent of the students ranked ability to converse well in a group discussion as of average to least importance and ability to give speeches was split rather evenly among the five rankings, with no marked grouping in any one category.

It is interesting to note that students had a tendency to rate as most important whatever the emphases in the particular class in which they were enrolled; for example EFL 174 students, who had just completed a research paper, ranked this skill as most important.

We have drawn several conclusions from the Needs Assessment at Arapahoe Community College: 1) curricula in the series of ESL classes must focus on the reading and vocabulary necessary for the beginning college student and on the brief writing tasks required in community college courses. Skills necessary to absorb material from a professor's lecture must also be emphasized: note-taking, listening for main ideas, asking questions, etc. Before evaluating the needs assessment, we were trying to include too many skills in our classes without a heavy concentration on those absolutely essential to student success. 2) the original series of three classes must be expanded into four so that immigrants and refugees can benefit from a beginning class while academic students can better concentrate on those skills in the three upper level classes. 3) use of the MTELP (with the addition of a 30-minute composition) will be retained as a testing and placement device for all entering foreign students because it does assess the areas emphasized in our study.

We plan to continue assessment of English language skills necessary for international students' success in the community college. A needs assessment can provide the ESL program with statistics to work with instead of generalized assumptions. Good ESL programs must be able to produce students who are as skillful in the English language as their American counterparts. For this reason, assessments of students' language needs are not just useful--they are essential.

Connie L. Shoemaker
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College

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November 18, 1980

A Questionnaire for Professors and Lecturers
At Arapahoe Community College

PART A DIRECTIONS: Look at the major subjects given below. Each has a box by it. Place number 1 in the box next to the subject you feel is the most important for foreign or immigrant students' success in the classes you instruct; place number 2 in the box which is next in importance; place number 3 in the box which is next in importance, etc. Continue until you have numbered all the boxes in PART A from the most important to the least important.

☐ Writing	☐ Grammar
☐ Listening	☐ Spelling
☐ Speaking	☐ Reading and Vocabulary

PART B DIRECTIONS: Read each of the subjects below. Under each subject there is a scale of numbers: 1 2 3 4 5
most important ... least important

The scales move from the most important (number 1) to the least important (number 5). 2 is less important than 1; 3 is less important than 2; 4 is less important than 3; 5 is least important of all. If you think the subject is most important for success in the classes you teach, circle number 1; if you think the subject is somewhere on the scale, circle 2, 3, or 4. Circle ONLY one number.

1. Ability to write a research paper

1 2 3 4 5
most important ... least important

2. Ability to write an organized essay answer on an essay test

1 2 3 4 5
most important ... least important

3. Ability to write a composition

1 2 3 4 5
most important ... least important

4. Ability to read textbooks in your major school subjects

1 2 3 4 5
most least
important important

5. Ability to recognize the main idea and supporting ideas of college textbooks and general reading

1 2 3 4 5
most least
important important

6. Ability to recognize the meaning of a large number of English words

1 2 3 4 5
most least
important important

7. Ability to listen while taking notes on a professor's lecture

1 2 3 4 5
most least
important important

8. Ability to listen well in order to answer the professor's questions and ask questions of the professor

1 2 3 4 5
most least
important important

9. Ability to spell a large number of common English words

1 2 3 4 5
most least
important important

10. Ability to outline a lecture or reading material

1 2 3 4 5
most least
important important

11. Ability to write grammatically correct sentences

1 2 3 4 5
most least
important important

12. Ability to converse well in a group discussion in a formal classroom

1	2	3	4	5
most important				least important

13. Ability to give speeches and/or reports in front of a college class

1	2	3	4	5
most important				least important

PART C DIRECTIONS: Please respond to the following questions about adaptation of lectures to foreign students.

1. Do you use any of the following techniques in classes with foreign students? (Check those used)

_____ Encourage students to study together in small groups after the lecture.

_____ Use audiovisual equipment, such as overhead projector, to illustrate lecture.

_____ Paraphrase or restate key concepts in simple language.

_____ Tape lectures.

_____ Other techniques. (Please explain.) _____

_____

2. Approximately how many foreign students (not refugees) do you presently have in your classes?

_____ Foreign students

3. Additional Comments or suggestions: